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Standoffs

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All across the Cularin system, battles are fought for a hundred different reasons. Protecting the forests, droid rights, freedom from Thaere, and the growing specter of the Clone Wars have pitted the once-peaceful settlers of this system against a myriad of foes from without and within. Some of these conflicts are bloodless, fought with legal wit and verbal skills in the boardrooms of the Senate. Others are far more violent, with death and destruction their only resolution...

"So what you are saying is this isn't going well? Really?"

Darrus glanced around at the glowing blaster holes in the metal craters around them and chuckled darkly. "Yes, sarcastic one. That's exactly what I was saying. We need to fall back and rethink our tactics."

On his other side, a voice remarkably similar to Trilinae's echoed from behind a stack of cargo boxes. "I can see what you see in him, Tril. He's using that Jedi power of 'state the fragging obvious' again!" Dropping another power cell into her rifle, Milinae rolled to one end of the stack and laid down a hissing stream of red blaster bolts.

It bought them just enough time for Master Jeht to throw Trilinae the pouch of cells from his belt. She shot him a grateful look, and then slapped them expertly into the receptacles on her heavy blasters. Popping up over her cover just high enough to give her pistols clearance, she nailed two of their assailants in the chest with a pair of blasts each. It was not enough to drop either of them, but deadly energy flared over both foes and tore holes in their armor.

"Okay, sis! They're open! Aim for the gaps in their chest plates!"

Milinae stopped firing and looked at her twin in disgust. "Do I look like a sniper to you? Why do you think I carry this rifle, Tril? I am all quantity, not quality!"

Darrus sighed, know full well how to extract himself from the middle of yet another argument between these two. "Right now, I'd take either. Excuse me." With that, he leapt over the crate, spiraling in midair to bat down two blasts with his violet lightsaber, and landed in front of their attackers. "Get to the ship!"

Trilinae stared at him in disbelief. "You mean after everything we've been through on this planet, we're just going to cut and run?" As she spoke, her sister grabbed her by the shoulder and started dragging her to the flight

deck of the outpost.

"Nope! We aren't even going to wait around long enough to cut!"

Darrus allowed himself a small smile as he heard Milinae say that. "That's not entirely true," he murmured as the first of the enforcers reached him. He parried another short-range blast from one of the combat droids and followed up with a triple slash that left its limbs and neck neatly severed. Even as the battle construct rained in pieces to the ground, two more moved up to take its place. "I may be a minute," he shouted over his shoulder at the retreating pair of Corellians. Then he was a blur of purple light and shearing metal.

Trilinae and Milinae ran as quickly as they could, with Tril looking back in obvious distress. "He'll be okay, sis," Milinae told her as they fled down the access hall. "It'll take more than a handful of battle bots to take down mister tall, dark, and broody, you know."

Their wrist communicators flashed as R-0, far ahead of them in the docking bay, started listing the number of opponents that were chasing them and how many of them were armed with heavy weapons or trained in anti-Jedi tactics. As the total entered the double digits, Milinae smashed Tril's display with her own -- shattering both screens. "See," she gave her panicked sister a forced half-smile, "no problem."

They reached the ramp leading up to the docking bays and skidded to a dead stop. At the top of the ramp, a trio of thick-bodied Trandoshans waited with repeating blasters. The sisters dived behind a computer terminal to avoid detection, but the onslaught of blaster fire told them otherwise. Quick thinking on Trilinae's part set up a jamming wave to keep the Trandoshans from calling for help, but she and her twin were outnumbered and outgunned as it was.

"Isn't it great how this night keeps going from bad to worse?" Milinae sighed and checked her empty grenade belt for the twentieth time. As with the last nineteen, it was still barren, though she did find a stick of chewing root stuck in a side pocket. She took it out and bit into it. The root was sour, having gone off a long time ago. "Perfect," she said with a groan. "I wonder if we'll get hit by a moon next."

Behind them, they heard the sound of Jeht's battle coming slowly closer. He was still alive, but he was obviously getting pressed back by the numbers. "Got any bright ideas, oh sister?"

Trilinae nodded slightly. "Maybe -- hush and let me concentrate."

Any irritation Mil might have expressed at being told to shut up was silenced by a renewed salvo of blaster fire hitting the console at their backs. The Trandoshans had all gathered at the top of the ramp and were trying to blow through their cover. From the heat emanating off the metal of the computer bank, it seemed to be working. "Now would be a good time!"

Trilinae ignored her sister's panic and tried to suppress her own. She was still very new to the Force, but Darrus had expressed his surprise at how well it flowed through her on more than one occasion. Now it was time to see

if all his mystic babble was worth the spit on a mynock. She reached out with her thoughts and envisioned her surroundings in her mind. With that done, she steeled herself for the hard part. She'd only ever done this successfully once and never in the middle of a firefight.

Milinae looked at her sister, who seemed to be taking a nap. "Fine time to rill out, dimwit," she hissed as she ducked around to take a strafing pass at the Trandoshans. Just as she expected, not a blessed shot actually came close to them. What she could not expect was what happened next.

Above the heads of the Trandoshans, a hanging platform piled with steel beams began to sway. As Milinae watched in disbelief, the release handle on the platform began to twist and open. One of the alien gunmen had the presence of mind to hear the metallic squeal of the vise as it came open, but that awareness was not enough to save him as tons of construction girders smashed down in a deadly rain of steel and scales.

Milinae winced at the echoing crunch of bone and flesh. "Okay, sis," she murmured breathlessly as she made sure there was nothing hanging above her own head. "I take the dimwit back."

Even as she spoke, a flutter of black robes came into view. Master Jeht was running far faster than anyone had a right to, leading a trio of heavily armored gunners. Though he was not looking back, his lightsaber was swinging at an awkward-seeming angle, knocking blaster bolts back at his attackers. Before he reached the spot where Milinae and her exhausted sister were crouched, one of Darrus' foes was already on the ground -- the victim of his own carbine shot.

Then he was past the twins, and his assailants were completely unaware of their presence. Milinae whispered a silent prayer of thanks to the gods that watched over fools, pilots, scoundrels, and Corellians in way over their heads. Then she stood up and poured the last of her rifle's power pack into a flurry of blazing death, screaming all the while.

When her gun stopped glowing and her voice gave out, she was staring into the vile, grinning face of a Weequay warrior and down the barrel of his impossibly large blaster. She smiled sweetly, waved hello, and tried to dive for cover in sheer panic. But she knew she could not move fast enough to save herself. It had been a brief life, Milinae thought, but a fun one.

Fortunately, she did not have to save herself. As she dove, a shaft of purple erupted from the warrior's chest in the same moment that heavy blaster fire drilled a hole through his leering smile. When the Weequay crumpled, Milinae stood back up to see Jeht and Tril standing on either side of her. "You happen to find your pride down there on the floor, sis?"

Milinae shook her head. "Nope, lost that ages ago. Can we leave now?"

As they moved quickly to the end of the docking ramp and into the ship bay itself, Jeht listened as the twins plotted out which ship they were going to steal, how best to steal it, and whether they had time to check cargo manifests to make sure they could make a decent profit this time.

Normally, he would advise them against such an action, but given that

everything they'd owned had been destroyed by the mysterious gangster "R" when the twin's ship had been blown to shreds, he felt the universe owed them this one. They had not been able to learn R's identity, but they knew with reasonable certainty that everything on and around this station belonged to him. Or her, Jeht corrected himself; there was no way to be sure of R's gender. As such, it was more recompense than theft.

Besides, there were no used spacecraft left back in the Cularin system. They had all been purchased or requisitioned by the Militia. Only new vessels were available, and neither of his companions had that kind of wealth. It was a shame, honestly. Trace Polters was a good man, but he just could not come up with ships that did not exist. With establishments like Trace's Ma'Haffee Shipyards unable to provide used starships, people were sometimes - - like now - - forced to seek other methods of procurement. Desperate times called for drastic actions.

At least, that's what he told himself while the women stared at a sleek star yacht with an angular hull that looked more like a hematite shark than a spaceship. In unison, they shouted, "Mine!" and raced each other for its boarding ramp...